

IN THE CLAIMS:

1. (Currently Amended) A method for managing user status values in an instant messaging system, wherein the user status values indicate the availability of a user to participate in an instant messaging session, the method comprising:

receiving a first request from a user to designate the user status value that is associated with the user such that a group of one or more users cannot initiate a new instant messaging session with the user; [[and]]

receiving a second request from the user to designate a subset of the group of one or more users such that the subset of the group of one or more users is authorized to initiate a new instant messaging session with the user while a remainder of the group of one or more users cannot initiate a new instant messaging session with the user[.];

displaying information associated with a buddy object within a window of the instant messaging application, wherein the buddy object represents an other user in the group of one or more users;

in response to receiving a request from the other user to initiate a new instant messaging session with the user, displaying information associated with the buddy object in the window of the instant messaging application indicating that the buddy object is authorized to initiate the new instant messaging session with the user;

receiving a request from an other user to initiate a new instant messaging session with the user;

in response to a determination that the other user is not included in the subset of the group of one or more users, denying the new instant messaging session with the user; and

in response to a determination that the other user is included in the subset of the group of one or more users, starting the new instant messaging session with the user.

2-5. (Canceled)

6. (Currently Amended) A computer program product on a computer readable medium for managing user status values in an instant messaging system, wherein the user status values indicate the availability of a user to participate in an instant messaging session, the computer program product comprising:

means for ~~receiving~~ receiving a first request from a user to designate the user status value that is associated with the user such that a group of one or more users cannot initiate a new instant messaging session with the user; [[and]]

means for receiving a second request from the user to designate a subset of the group of one or more users such that the subset of the group of one or more users is authorized to initiate a new instant messaging session with the user while a remainder of the group of one or more users cannot initiate a new instant messaging session with the user[.];

means for displaying information associated with a buddy object within a window of the instant messaging application, wherein the buddy object represents an other user in the group of one or more user;

means for displaying information associated with the buddy object within the window of the instant messaging application indicating that the buddy object is authorized to initiate a new instant messaging session with the user;

means for receiving a request from an other user to initiate a new instant messaging session with the user;

in response to a determination that the other user is not included in the subset of the group of one or more users, means for denying the new instant messaging session with the user; and

in response to a determination that the other user is included in the subset of the group of one or more users, means for starting the new instant messaging session with the user.

7-10. (Canceled)

11. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for managing user status values in an instant messaging system, wherein the user status values indicate the availability of a user to participate in an instant messaging session, the apparatus comprising:

means for receiving a first request from a user to designate the user status value that is associated with the user such that a group of one or more users cannot initiate a new instant messaging session with the user; [[and]]

means for receiving a second request from the user to designate a subset of the group of one or more users such that the subset of the group of one or more users is authorized to initiate a new instant messaging session with the user while a remainder of the group of one or more users cannot initiate a new instant messaging session with the user[.];

means for displaying information associated with a buddy object within a window of the instant messaging application, wherein the buddy object represents an other user in the group of one or more users, wherein the buddy object represents an other user in the group of one or more user;

means for displaying information associated with the buddy object in the window of the instant messaging application indicating that the buddy object is authorized to initiate a new instant messaging session with the user;

means for receiving a request from an other user to initiate a new instant messaging session with the user;

in response to a determination that the other user is not included in the subset of the group of one or more users, means for denying the new instant messaging session with the user; and

in response to a determination that the other user is included in the subset of the group of one or more users, means for starting the new instant messaging session with the user.

12-15. (Canceled)